

P 310455Z OCT 08
FM AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6410
INFO SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY

UNCLAS LUSAKA 001054

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ZA](#)
SUBJECT: ZAMBIA ELECTION DAY REPORT #3: AN UNREMARKABLE
DAY OF POLLING

REF: A. LUSAKA 1053
[B.](#) LUSAKA 1054

Summary:

[¶](#)1. (U) Summary: Zambia's October 30 elections were unremarkable -- peaceful, orderly, and without violence. Turnout was low; estimates range from 50 percent to less than 25 percent. Low turnout tends to favor incumbents, and post believes Acting President Banda should benefit. The Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) made some missteps: its failure to deliver replacement voter registration cards, for example, will be a hotly discussed topic in the aftermath of the election. Life in Lusaka has returned to normal as Zambians wait patiently for results, due within hours or days. End summary.

Unremarkable (just the way we want it)

[¶](#)2. (U) International and local media and observers report extremely peaceful and orderly behavior at election stations throughout Zambia. Embassy teams confirmed these reports and were impressed by ECZ staff professionalism by and large. However, some smaller rural stations encountered "human capacity" constraints, but clearly no malfeasance. Apparently heeding the October 29 entreaties by (separately and at their respective final rallies) both UPND candidate Hakainde Hichilema and the PF's Michael Sata to eschew aggression and accept the election results, opposition supporters remained calm; there were no reports of violence as of 8:00 pm local time.

Mistakes Fuel Suspicions that will Linger

[¶](#)3. (U) According to Zambian media reports, voting was extended beyond the 6:00 pm closing in many parts of Kitwe in the Copperbelt. Kitwe was the locus of much complaining by opposition parties about replacement voter registration cards during the day. Voters in Kitwe who had followed ECZ instructions to secure replacement cards were nonetheless turned away because the new cards had not been distributed. The ECZ delivered some of the &missing8 Kitwe voter cards from Lusaka by helicopter in the afternoon.

[¶](#)4. (U) An unscientific canvassing of a few working-class Lusakans showed that most had not voted because they had lost their voter registration cards and failed to request a new one as instructed by the ECZ. These potential voters are Michael Sata's core constituency. These Lusaka observations could be further evidence of haste-induced ECZ missteps (or, much less likely, a conscious campaign by ECZ to disenfranchise some voters), but emboffs believe many Zambians simply misplaced their cards since 2006 and never got around to applying for new ones. Either way, post-election diatribes about the cards are a certainty.

Low turnout: Is it the heat or the humility?

[¶](#)5. (U) Embassy observer teams (who all told visited scores

of polling stations) estimate that turnout was approximately 50 percent. Zambian news broadcasts paint a more pessimistic picture. Low turnout typically favors incumbent parties -- which would tip the balance toward Acing President Banda, but anecdotal observation gives Sata credible support even with the disappointing turnout.

¶6. (U) According to national broadcaster ZNBC, in Western Province voting proceeded at a slow pace throughout the day. Zambian television journalists said voters attributed the low turnout to both the heat and widespread loss of voter registration cards. In the more remote and isolated Northwest and Luapula provinces, turnout was particularly low. In several Northwest Province polling stations shown on the national evening TV news, less than 25 percent of registered voters cast ballots. Luapula was worse still) one polling station recorded only 505 voters out of more than 10,900 registered voters. In major towns in Southern Province participation was higher, particularly in the morning. Lines had formed at polling stations in Choma by 5:00 am, an hour before the polls opened.

An anti-climactic denouement

¶7. (U) By early evening, vehicular and pedestrian traffic and daily activity in Lusaka had returned to normal. Police and military headquarters, the Ministry of Defence, and State House all appeared to be closed for the night. International and local news moved stories about the conflict in Eastern DRC to the front. Embassy teams are witnessing vote counts and thus far report few if any indications of vote rigging or egregious departure from ECZ protocols. Emboffs will try to verify posted results as a deterrent to "creative accounting." Embassy teams will spend the next several hours observing vote counting, tabulation, and in some cases transportation of voting materials. Post expects initial release of results on October 31 and a winner could be declared by November 1. The presidential inauguration will take place within 24 hours of the Chief Justice's declaration.

BOOTH